Unexpected Blue Bonnets: Valentina's Determination, Riley's Romantic Boldness, and Venezuela Truth-Bombs [Updated Version]

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by lefemmerouge

Summary

One warm spring day, Val is relaxing on her bed, reading about the news, and thinking back to when she arrived in the U.S. as an immigrant from Venezuela, with her parents, almost seventeen years before. She is surprised when her adorable Minnesotan friend (or more than a friend) shows up to hang out. As they spent time together, they connect in a deep way. Despite some awkwardness from time to time, and her friend making an error about her birth country, they eat together and enjoy one another's company. As they so, their love continues to blossom like a beautiful centaurea cyanus flower.

Notes

Happy April 23rd!

I originally posted this on AO3 for the Spring Writing Event hosted by r/FanfictionExchange. Since publication on AO3, it garnered over 600 hits, 5 bookmarks, 9 comments, and 18 kudos. Much of my original A/N below is retained, but some of is changed. I later cross-posted the original fic on here (listed in inspirations), Wattpad, and Quotev. However, I was denied from posting it on Royal Road with the claim the fic was "too real and political" and that political elements are allowed but *only* in a restricted way. I stand by what I said at the time that I reject censorship of fics to post them anywhere. I'm never gonna censor a fic so I can post it on a site.

Anyway, when I saw this prompt-filling exchange on a certain site, I decided to bring in this story. It **fulfills** the following prompt: "Should have some or all of the following: Current Events, Age Gaps, Food Sharing, Cooking, Kissing, Surprise Kissing, Implied/Referenced Homophobia, Developing Relationship, Aged-Up Character(s)". This fic is revised from the original (which was 6,306 words long) with the addition of 1,297 words (or about 20.6% more), for a total of 7,603 words, including expanding sections relating to events in Venezuela in the past

year, as many of you are undoubtedly aware. This included incorporating recent articles about Venezuela. Specifically, I added in various paragraphs, revised the end note, and more like adding in line breaks, among other changes, while not changing other parts. Since I published this before, on March 13th of this year, parts of this fic may be slightly outdated.

While it was reported elsewhere that Valentina is Dominican-American, as commenter (and fellow fic writer) GirlinNavy noted on AO3, "The Art of Inside Out 2" describes Val as a "first gen Cuban-Mexican American". In this fic, since her talented voice actress, Lilimar Hernandez (who voiced Cleopatra in Cleopatra in Space) is from Venezuela, as she was born on Margarita Island to Cuban parents, moved to Miami at six years old, and later moved to L.A., I went with the headcanon that Val is Venezuelan. Furthermore, considering that "Inside Out" 1 and 2 are set in San Francisco, and the ice hockey camp is presumably in the same state, I'm describing Val as Venezuelan-American. The age gap between Val and Riley exists, but I could did not find any info on Val's exact age (some say 17, others say 16). So, for this story, Val is 16 and Riley is age 13, an age gap which shouldn't be an issue.

Technically, "Val Ortiz's Mom" is an original character since she does not appear in the original film. Other parts of this fic are loosely based on my personal experience of certain events in my life and from what I've heard. For instance, the set-up of the kitchen resembles the kitchen in my childhood home.

The background throughout this fic is important for showing what Val knows about Venezuela and where *she* is coming from. I know this may not be everyone's cup of tea. Some may grumble with how it is explained, but it is a *vital* part of this story. I will say that I'm gonna keep writing and publishing fics about Venezuela. I am approaching Venezuela from a Western perspective. I am countering how that country, and its people, are portrayed in the corporate media in this fic. I am not covering every aspect of Venezuela here, but only what I know from self-education. Links to over 70 reliable sources, from various sources, alternative, corporate, and otherwise, are linked throughout this fic. Other sources were added later in order to ensure this fic was fully updated when it was posted here.

I hope you enjoy the fic. Thanks for reading. Comments, and constructive criticism, are welcome, but negative or hostile comments will not be published.

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Unexpected Blue Bonnets: Surprised Valentina, Riley's Romantic Boldness, and Venezuela Truth-Bombs by lefemmerouge

Maybe it was because she was watching news, or maybe it was something else, but Valentina thought back to when, all those years ago, she came to the U.S. with her parents. The year was 2008, an election year. A presidential campaign season was in full swing. There were two teams of candidates. The first was comprised of a moderate Black man and a tenured White male senator. The second comprised two White politicians. The latter was headed by a White man who represented the previous, and detested, administration, and his folksy, but brain-dead, running mate. The financial crisis had hit the country badly. Many were out of work. She and her parents could have settled in Florida, like thousands of others from Venezuela. But instead, they traveled to California to get jobs in the entertainment industry. They *felt* they would be safe there.

That same year, Hugo Chavez, architect of the Bolivarian revolution, a movement begun in the 1990s which aimed to establish political and cultural hegemony in Venezuela, so that the country could decide its own destiny, dared the U.S. to put the country on the state-sponsors of terrorism list. He declared they were in a "battle against North American imperialism." Later that year, international tensions were so high that Chavez expelled the U.S. ambassador from the country in an act of solidarity with Bolivia. The latter accused the U.S. of fomenting violent protests in their country. Venezuela also withdrew their ambassador from Washington, D.C at the same time.

Due to everything happening back then, it was no surprise that Valentina's parents saw the situation in Venezuela as extremely perilous. They had been working for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). She vaguely remembered what they told her: that they had fled Venezuela because they were helping bring "democracy" to the country. Some years later, she learned that this organization, which influenced countries just as the CIA had done years prior (and continued to do), was *not* about democracy at all. In fact, it supported an unsuccessful coup in 2002, tried to manipulate electoral outcomes, and helped undermine the duly-elected Venezuelan government. Whether one fully agreed with the Venezuelan government or not, U.S. intervention made it impossible for Venezuelans to *truly* determine their own political future. She found that disturbing.

All these years later, another presidential election had taken the country's attention. A Black woman who vowed to continue the policies of an aging White man, and a fascist in a suit, faced off against one another. However, Venezuela was not on the minds of many. Instead, they were focused on economic strains, climate change, and "problems" caused by migrants. The latter was an avenue for them to project their racial fears. The news noted that Nicolas Maduro, the individual elected following

Chavez's death in March 2013, remained in power, despite efforts by the CIA and others to overthrow him. Typically, the CIA denied those claims.

Some called for *more* sanctions, despite the fact that they would hurt ordinary Venezuelans more than anyone else. The latter were admitted to have exacerbated a humanitarian crisis in the country. All the while, the sitting U.S. government grumbled about "repression," claimed election tampering, and openly welcomed Venezuelan opposition, which had reportedly lost steam when Western-educated opposition leader Edmundo González Urrutia fled the country. The U.S. government *abhorred* the duly-elected social democratic government. González Urrutia had wanted a "democratic transition," whatever that meant. He had replaced a U.S.-backed far-right opposition leader named María Corina Machado. The U.S. wanted a more friendly government, one which would allow U.S. companies to swoop in, without restriction, and exploit the country's so-called "natural resources." They wanted to siphon off the country's resources to benefit money-grubbing wealthy Americans rather than Venezuelans. Some students had expressed their anti-government sentiments, called for restoration of "democracy," and "freedom," but these sentiments were sadly misguided.

Valentina knew all of this. She read about it, on her own, for years and years. Educating yourself on what is happening in the world isn't always easy. Everything was in a bit of a haze, since not many people have very early memories. However, one stuck in her mind: her parents cheering when it was announced that the aforementioned Black man, Barack Obama, who could *also* be described as multiracial, since he had a Black father and White mother, had won the U.S. presidency. Before that point, Chavez had declared that Obama, and the man he was running against, were defending "the interests of empire." Undoubtedly, Chavez was annoyed after the U.S. accused Venezuela of supporting a Colombian paramilitary group known as FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), but remained open to being Obama's friend.

That didn't pan out. The U.S. would, during Obama's time in office, impose sanctions on Venezuelans *reportedly* engaged in "human rights abuses," and sanctioned others under an even broader executive order. With the victory of the orange menace in 2016, against an outwardly militarist and corporatist candidate, who called his supporters "deplorables," U.S. policy got tougher, with more sanctions and proposed U.S. military intervention. His administration even backed an unsuccessful coup. Unsurprisingly, Venezuela broke diplomatic ties with the U.S. in January 2019 after the U.S.-backed right-wing Juan Guaidó was wrongly claimed as "the winner."

This continued into the administration led by *another* old White man. There were attempts to offset loss of Russian oil imports with Venezuelan petroleum exports and sanctions relief, and then there was re-imposition

of sanctions after that country's presidential election in July 2024, with the absurd claim there was election fraud. While the election season went on, Valentina had thought, to herself, that neither one of the major party candidates would truly do *anything* to benefit Venezuelans or their appetite for *real* democracy within the country. Instead, the two major party candidates in the U.S. wanted democracy which benefited the imperial core, even if more people were exploited along the way. That was more the case now since that the orange menace had reigned victorious in part thanks to voter suppression. The latter made her sick to her stomach. Sanctions had been tightened, even resulting in the Venezuelan government selling off a state oil firm, appealing for foreign investment, and refusing to accept any more deportation flights.

When the U.S. illegally, unconstitutionally, and unilaterally kidnapped Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores, in early January, sweeping them away to the U.S. so they could be brought before a court and charged with largely manufactured (and politically motivated) claims, which made him seem like some kind of drug kingpin, Valentina was disturbed. She didn't like the fact that the A.I. model, Claude was reportedly used, in a contract with the shadowy Palantir, in the raid either. These A.I. models were completely out of control and needed to be banned. Without a doubt, Maduro and his government had their issues. At times, he had ruled with an iron fist. Even so, to say he was a "dictator" or a "terrorist" was blatantly untrue. The U.S. fulfilled more of those descriptors than anything else, especially since they conspired with Zionist military forces to bomb Iran, killing hundreds, and injuring many more, in an illegal, unconstitutional, and reckless war. Iranian retaliatory strikes were criticized as destabilizing the region even though they were *forced* into the armed conflict against their will. The U.S. and Israel gloated when they murdered Iran's Supreme Leader, who was replaced by his son, Mojtaba Khamenei, who was even more of a hardliner than his father. The U.S. and Israel did not care about how the murder of Mojtaba's father would inflame those across Muslim-majority countries. The U.S. let Israel crack down on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and let them ruthlessly bomb Lebanon to supposedly "fight Hezbollah."

The propaganda about Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, North Korea, or any other country deemed an "enemy" was so thick it was hard to cut through. She was still unsure what to make of the fact that the Venezuelan leader for now, Delcy Rodríguez, was working with the U.S. She had agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations, and with agreement from lawmakers, partially privatize the country's oil industry in an effort to revitalize the economy, while signing an amnesty law, and trying to be "pragmatic." The State Department itself had declared that there would be joint U.S.-Venezuelan efforts "to promote stability, support economic recovery, and advance political reconciliation in Venezuela" while beginning a phased process to create conditions for "a peaceful transition to a democratically elected government." That implied that the current government was not

democratic even as another part of the U.S. government seemed to recognize the government's legitimacy but *did not* let them access frozen assets. The U.S. even eased restrictions, allowing farmers to buy Venezuelan fertilizer and oil as prices raised thanks to the war in Iran.

Val knew about the María Corina Machado, remembering she was an arch right-wing, and U.S.-backed, Venezuelan opposition leader. She had previously lent her support for overthrowing the government of Venezuela in 2006, while supporting mass privatization in the country, sanctions on Venezuela, and U.S. military intervention. She also expressed admiration of awful neoliberal British conservative Margaret Thatcher and supported the genocidal U.S.-Israeli war in Gaza. After Machado foolishly gave her Noble Peace Prize to the orange menace for "concessions" it proved she was an *utter joke* who had no credibility in any way, shape or form. Anyone who thought she should run Venezuela was out of their mind and clearly supported hardship for the Venezuelan people. All the while, Rodríguez had declared she had enough with "Washington's orders over politicians in Venezuela," including herself. However, since a vice president can only occupy the presidency in Venezuela for a period of up to 90 days, which can be extended for another 90 days, it remained to be seen whether Rodríguez would even last that long, as she aimed to preserve (her) political power.

All of this might have seemed a heavy topic for a girl who headed a varsity hockey team and proudly had a red streak through her hair. Her confident style, plus her dedication to be kind and supportive of others, had garnered her fans on the team, and within her high school. As a result, many saw her as a role model. She didn't care about the latter. Not at all. In fact, she was very humble, even as a leader. She never wanted to be the *mean girl*. She never bullied anyone, or even thought of doing anything like that. In fact, she could be nervous, weird, or quirky, just like anyone else.

She could lift up those who were star-struck, or intimidated, by her. This included a girl who was three years younger than her, a girl from rural Minnesota, named Riley Andersen. While that girl remained happy to her core, her new emotions had thrown her for a loop, even causing her to have a panic attack. Valentina helped her through that, while remaining empathetic. The other girls at the hockey camp helped too. At that very moment, she sprawled across her bed and was texting back and forth with Riley. They had become friends, or perhaps something more, after her episode at the camp. She had forgiven her for what she had done before. She'd even gotten used to Riley's friends, who she could admit were *a bit weird* sometimes.

While sitting at home, in her room, sitting across her bedspread, she wasn't wearing any makeup, like her trademark red eye-shadow. She

didn't have on her golden necklace emblazoned with her name, which her mom had given her some years ago, nor golden piercings. She had a much more relaxed look. She wore a classic royal-blue sweater across one shoulder over-top a black bra. She also had on black sweatpants and red short socks, completing her look. Her brown eyes stared at her phone screen. She was curious. Riley had stopped typing. She scratched her head and twirled her brown hair with her fingers. *What was Riley doing?*

Just then she heard the doorbell ring. Her mom had gone to some event with other Venezuelan émigrés. She was there *alone*. The flowers were blooming outside. It was so much brighter than the previous months, with many days that had been gray and overcast from the rain and other precipitation. She was glad that winter was *finally* over. Spring was perhaps her favorite season, apart from autumn. Even though she was an ice hockey player, it turned out she wasn't a big fan of the cold *outside* the hockey field. While she liked warm weather in the summer, she also disliked being sunburned, and the sweltering heat.

She quickly ran down to the door and grabbed the handle. In one sweeping motion, she swung it open. As the warm spring air rushed inside, she saw the girl she didn't expect: Riley. What in the world was she doing there? And *why*? She had been *completely* caught off guard. Now would *definitely* not be the time to admit that she didn't like winter. It might confuse the girl even more, considering their shared love of ice hockey.

"Hey, Val. Nice to see you on this wonderful day! I thought we could hang out...since it's...uh...a Saturday after all."

Staring at Riley's cornflower blue-eyes, Val *knew* she couldn't say no. It wouldn't be right. She hadn't planned for this visit, but she was okay with letting her in. What would be the harm? Nothing bad would happen, *right?*

"Sure, sure, you can come in...I wasn't doing *anything*...just reading some news...everything happening in the world is so damn awful."

After Val closed the door behind her, Riley began to walk into the living room. Val pointed up the wooden stairs. "Come on, let's go to my room. It's *more comfortable* there, anyway."

This made Riley very nervous. She had never been to Val's room in all the time they had been friends. What if something happened there? What if she broke something? What if...

Her thoughts were completely cut off when Val tightly grabbed her hand. "Come on, Riley. *Let's go*." For one reason or another, Riley was completely mesmerized. She began to blush. Perhaps it was Val's

nonchalant, kind, and mature nature. It wasn't her sense of humor, at least not *this time*. Ever since she had met her, she had admired Val. Now, she saw her as less of a star, less of an inspirational person. She saw her as a *real* person, someone who was a cool older girl and go-getter who could give her guidance. In Japanese culture, the term "Val-chan" might have been used, but in U.S. culture, that honorific wasn't used except among anime and manga fans.

After entering Val's room, Riley could tell that it was tidy and clean, as she had expected it would. Even the bed looked neatly made, apart from some rumples caused by her laying across it earlier. After Riley came in, Val slightly closed the door. She started speaking, without warning. "So, I was thinking about my roots recently...and my *home country*..."

Riley wasn't sure how to respond. She knew enough that she had awareness that asking someone about where they were from *could* be tricky. You didn't want to ask in such a way that demonized and hurt someone. At the same time, you couldn't let your curiousness about someone undermine inclusiveness. Rather, you could talk with that person as a friend and a colleague, instead of as an outsider.

"Oh okay, tell me *more* about that."

Val took a deep breath. Maybe this was *too much* for Riley to take in, but she decided to tell her about it anyway. She felt a connection with Riley in one way or another. Why not reveal a bit more about herself?

"Well, I was born on Margarita Island. It's only 390-square-miles across. Now it's racked by organized crime thanks to a crisis engineered, in large part, by this...country."

Before Riley could take in Val's last statement, which confused her, she wanted to step back a bit. *Where* was this island? *What* country was it in? She wasn't always great with geography, but she'd never heard of a place with that name. She tried to ask about it the *best way* without causing any offense. The *last thing* she would want was to annoy Val.

"So...uh...where is Margarita Island?"

Val laughed. She forgot that not many people knew where an island like that was location. Not everyone could name all the islands and islets near the mainland, but *she could*. She had learned them all on her own. Perhaps the Geobee had been worth it after all, where she had been booted from the national contest by getting a question wrong about Qatar of all places.

"It's off the coast of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I mean...Venezuela, you know."

Oh, *that* country. She knew about it tangentially, not from the private "debate party" with her parents, in which one vice presidential candidate had called for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, and claimed they were hurting those who "deserve to be here," but from the presidential debate over a year ago. At that debate, the fascist in a suit had absurdly declared that the U.S. allowed millions of criminals, terrorists, and others into the U.S. from Venezuela and elsewhere. He red-baited by claiming his opponent would turn the country into "Venezuela on steroids." Otherwise, her knowledge was limited, apart from nightly news casts, which occasionally mentioned the country.

She put all of that lack of knowledge aside. The *worst thing* she wanted was to embarrass herself in front of someone like Val. She decided to lighten the mood, or attempted to. She accidentally blurted something out by accident, without thinking about it much. *Oops*. She couldn't take this back.

"Oh, I *thought* you were from the Dominican Republic...someone told me…"

Val cut her off. *Why* did she think that? *Who* had told her that false information? She didn't want to get angry at her or anything, but that was a *pretty big error,* at least in her book. She had to correct Riley on this. She had no choice. She couldn't let this slide. Clearly still annoyed, she began her retort.

"Whoever told you that is *full of crap*...I need to give *that person* a talking to."

She could tell Val was getting angry. Her struggles were beginning to bubble to the surface. Riley wasn't always the best with this kind of thing. Even so, she thought she'd try to bring down the negative energy.

"Val, don't worry about it...I mean, *you* thought I was from Michigan when we first met…"

She realized that her dirty-blonde-haired friend was right. It wasn't *anything* to fret over, especially since she didn't know *who* had given Riley the wrong information. But now that she knew the truth… she wouldn't make that damn mistake ever *again*, so she was glad about that, at least. She chuckled a little.

"Thanks, Riley. *Sometimes* I just don't feel like I'm doing enough...I'm *not* always as put together as you think...it takes a *lot* of effort to remain cool."

She understood that. She firmly held Val's hand. "It will be okay. If there's anything you need...I'll try to help." Val was a bit taken aback. She hadn't expected Riley to be that forceful. It was *fine*. Isn't this the type of thing

friends did? Or at least that's what she would tell her mom. Riley came in a little closer and sat next to her. She spoke so softly that only Val could hear what she said next.

"I wanna know *more* about why you think this country engineered the crisis in Venezuela…that's not what people say on social media or the nighttime TV broadcasts…I know so little and someone as smart, *beautiful*, and laid-back as you, maybe *you* can…help me out."

Val blushed a little. Her olive skin began to become warm. Did Riley *really* call her beautiful and smart *in one sentence*? She hadn't expected that. Maybe she was being bolder.

Taking a deep breath, she realized she wanted to learn *more* about Riley too. She had felt something for her from the moment they met. She wanted to help her out and share her knowledge with her. She wanted them to share something more. She guessed that her Minnesotan friend felt similarly, but she couldn't know for sure unless she asked her. Suddenly, she started getting a little nervous.

"Is it getting hot in here…or is it *just me*? Let's go down to the kitchen and get something eat…we can talk there instead of here…it will be more comfortable down there, you know."

Riley hadn't expected that. Her emotions were going wild and she wasn't sure how she could contain them. She didn't know how to respond. Should she be glad? What *should* she be feeling? Sure, she had watched a host of animated series where characters said the same thing, often Japanese series which focused on intimate friendships or romances between girls. She secretly liked them a lot. She'd be *way* too embarrassed to tell Val about it. She didn't say anything else and followed behind Val. They made their way down to the kitchen.

Riley sat on one side of the counter, which had a shiny granite top. Val went on the other side. Some people liked these surfaces because they were easy to clean, but this didn't prevent them from chipping. To make matters worse, there were tiles on the floor, with grooves between them, which looked nice. However, it was *a pain* if they ever got dirty or the tiles had to be cleaned.

The kitchen had once been a garage. The house's former occupants had turned it into a kitchen. One of them, who worked as some ~~pencil-pusher~~ bureaucrat within the Internal Revenue Service once boasted that he was a socialist. He declared that one way to make change was from "the inside." Val's parents weren't sure what to make of this, since they had been influenced by anti-socialist propaganda spread by the country's opposition forces, which were backed by the U.S. and other Western countries. All those countries wanted do was to ravage the country and

exploit it to the fullest. They *didn't care* about the people who lived there at all. They claimed "democracy" was their goal, but that was an utter lie. They could care less about democracy. Some even thought that Delcy Rodríguez would "become a Latin American Deng Xiaoping" which not a good sign, considering he was a... capitalist roader as he had been described by some. His policies not only included the controversial one-child policy but political crackdowns, and more, while leading to the "Xiagang" in the later 1990s, a term referring to a series of mass layoffs within China.

It took a while for Val to unlearn all this reactionary crap. Even so, she still *never* openly shared her views about Venezuela in the frequent family gatherings, especially with everything that happened with Maduro, his wife Cilia, Rodríguez, Machado, and the orange one. She usually just nodded along or acted like she agreed. She was afraid of what they might say, what they might accuse her of, even though the fact she had a different opinion was not a bad thing. There's no rule saying children *must* have the same views as their parents. If there ever was such a rule, it would certainly be violated over and over again.

Val opened the stainless steel fridge and saw what was inside. She had learned over the years how to make Venezuelan food. She knew some of the typical "common" foods eaten by teens, whether spaghetti, pizza, and stuff like that. But, those weren't her favorite things to eat. Surely not all Venezuelan émigrés eat the foods of their home country, but some do. Val's family was the latter. They enjoyed vegetables and many tropical fruits, with food reflecting the country's rich history, including flavors from Africa, Spain, and Italy, of all places. This included a disk made of corn-dough which could be fried or baked, and filled with grated cheese, or some other food. It was called an *arepa*. How it was cooked had changed over time.

She had many choices for what she could make. She could cook pancakes from ground, and grated, corn, on a flat griddle, slathering it with margarine and soft white cheese. These were known as *cachapas* and were a staple of street food. There was also a wide variety of fish eaten, whether red snappers, groupers, trout, or kingfish, often with rice, fried plantains, and a salad consisting of grilled tomatoes and carrots. Some food was barbecued. Many soups were consumed, including hearty pumpkin (*auyama*) or lentil (*lenteja*) soup, or a mix of vegetables, fruits, and meat, named *sancocho*.

There were regional specialties too, but the Venezuela's national dish was the *pabellon criollo*, which came in many different forms. People across the country liked eating avocados, black beans, and various meat dishes. These were accompanied, more often than not, by drinks that used exotic fruits, filtered water, or even alcohol (for those who were old enough). Of course, there were also fried corn-dough turnovers,

commonly called *empanadas*, an bakery snacks like *pastelitos*, *cachitos*, *golfeados*, or many deserts. Many Venezuelans had a sweet tooth. Val did as well.

Staring inside the fridge, she saw ingredients for most of these dishes. Even so, she knew that pastelitos, cachitos, and golfeados would take too long to make, or included animal products. She had become a strict vegetarian and refused to deviate from that, thanks to some people she met in a Rumblr community. That was one thing she did *not* mind bringing up in family gatherings. She knew food was an important part of her family get-togethers. She decided to make cachapas. She pulled out a frying pan from the cupboard, then vegetable oil, which she had put into a spray bottle (she convinced her parents to do this) and began cooking.

Riley was completely amazed. She *didn't know* that Val knew how to cook, at least not like this. She saw her as a cool, yet kind and empathetic girl, who could be laid-back and childlike at times, while sporting an iconic red stripe in her hair. She could also be *very* trendy like anyone else who was her age. Val started by mixing the egg, corn kernels, flour, and sugar together in a blender, from an old machine her grandma had given them, for about third seconds, and then transferred the mix to a bowl. At the same time, she prepared the frying pan.

She proceeded to brush the pan with the vegetable oil, place the batter onto the pan, swirl it around, and cook each of these pancakes one by one. She cooked them long enough until their bottom sides were golden brown, then did the same on the top side. She had a plate ready to go. She topped the cachapas with shredded mozzarella, which she had prepared while cooking other parts of the dish. She artfully folded these cakes-of-sorts in half, like a taco, and slid one over to Riley. She finished cooking the others and used up the rest of the batter. Although some liked serving cakes with hot sauce, she *did not*. She already had enough *hotness* in her life. She didn't have to go wild with her food *too*.

Riley wanted to wait until Val sat down before she started eating, but Val insisted that she begin anyway. Her stomach grumbled. Her face turned as bright as a grilled tomato. Unable to stop herself, she decided to chow down. All the tastes came together, whether the flour, the corn, the egg, the sugar, or the cheese. She loved nothing more than *good cheese*. Who didn't? Perhaps it was because she had some Italian roots. Her great-grandparents had immigrated from northern Italy, in the Emilia-Romagna region, to be exact, before the beginning of the first world war. Some family members had speculated that her great-grandfather had been trying to flee the draft, but no one knew for sure. By the time she began researching into it, he wasn't alive anymore, and her dad knew as much as she did, which was… *very little*.

"Val, this is...*amazing*! I didn't know you could make such good food...maybe I should have you as *my wife*, so you can make so many wonderful meals for the rest of my life."

After she said that, she realized she had made a mistake. Had she just, *sort of* proposed to Val. OOPS! She didn't mean to say that, but it just came out. Val began blushing and tried to laugh it off.

"Yeah, I'm getting better at cooking, but I need to figure out how to *make it vegan* next time...without using an egg...I could be *your wife* too, if you want to...you know...down the line."

Riley was dumbstruck. Val had said they were going to get married someday? Right? She was so excited. She had some cousins which did the same in Minnesota and she had gone to their weddings, along with other family friends. Even so, she didn't know what to say next. *How* do you navigate this situation? What do you say next? She was still figuring out. Perhaps she and Val could figure it out *together*.

The awkwardness faded as they chattered away. Val's comment about them marrying each other in the future dissipated into nothingness. Neither one wanted to move too fast. They weren't throwing some impromptu party on the beach, singing a song, and asking the other one to marry them. That would be that foolish. Nor would they get advice about something like this from any hopeless romantics. Instead, they would go at their own pace. If they decided they would marry, it would be their decision. In any case, they would stay together and try to learn more about each other as a first step.

Val brought the subject back to politics and… Venezuela. It was one of the things she cared deeply about and followed every single day. She even had a news alert set up for it, even though she was wary about talking with fellow Venezuelan-Americans about it since they could be very reactionary on the subject.

"Riley, you said you wanted to know more about Venezuela. Well, now is a perfect time. Previously, *this* country was labeling some right-wing opposition leader as the rightful president, rather than one who was elected, and now it is hard to take stock of what is *actually happening* there, with possible changes in foreign and domestic policy pushed onto the people. It's so damn frustrating. Can't this country *actually* respect democracy for once? Gah!"

Riley was unsure what to say to her. She had seen some headlines in the past year about proposed, and possible, U.S. legal cooperation with Venezuela, or claims of efforts to "stabilize" the country's oil industry. But she had never read the articles fully. That was something she needed to do. Sometimes it was far to easy to read bit-sized news, but not read the *actual* articles. Social media encouraged the former.

"Isn't Maduro a...*bad guy*?" Riley began, then hedged her comment. "Didn't his government commit all sorts of human rights violations?...I mean, that's what they *always* say, right?"

Val knew that the corporate media was against Venezuela in more ways than one, whether supporting regime change, or possible military intervention, which had happened in January of that year, through their coverage. All the while the U.S.-backed client states like Paraguay worked to undermine Venezuela. She began laughing and shook her head. She was prepared to tell Riley what was really going on, at least from what she knew.

"Maduro wasn't the best, I grant you, but he was *elected*. That's more than you can say about this country, where a billionaire was ravaging public institutions and tearing apart the civil service without any regard for anyone, except himself, all in a *supposed* effort to save money. The jerks he put in place are still here. It's utterly disgusting. The government in Venezuela, was, before this January, aligned with peace, sovereignty, and Palestine. Social movements and others are interlinked with what they call the Bolivarian Revolution. They continually push the government to do more to hold back the wealthy and to do *more* to help the populace. It's a continual struggle...I-I-I-I have *very mixed feelings* about Delcy Rodríguez, as she has been collaborating with the U.S. She even agreed to let large foreign companies mine minerals like gold and coal and rare earth elements within Venezuela! There's planned reforms and privatization might be on the table. Despite that, there's no doubt that damn María Corina Machado is an utter joke. She has no credibility. Despite Rodríguez's issues, the U.S. is not *directly* in charge of Venezuela, so... that is good thing."

Riley wasn't sure what to tell her. She knew that if her parents were there, they'd probably harp on why Venezuela should be sanctioned to death, parroting what they heard from the nightly news, even if they didn't *directly* support killing Venezuelans, not did they support when Maduro and his wife, Cilia, were kidnapped. They weren't those kind of people. They cared about human rights, but also supported *imposing* the "right" values on certain people. She had started to grow uncomfortable with the latter, as she learned more about the bloody history of the U.S. through her own reading and self-education.

Before Riley could say anything more, Val added, "I can *tell you* some good sources I am aware of. I like reading *Dissident Voice*, *Venezuela Analysis*, and some others on Glubsnack. You need to know how to read the news carefully, whether corporate media or the ones which call themselves 'alternative,' you know. It is far too easy to read false stories, either those which are complete lies or those hallucinated with those wicked A.I. tools."

Riley was overjoyed to hear this. Why not learn more about the country *your really good friend* was from? It was far too easy to get stuck inside her bubble and not care that much about the world around you. You could easily create a bubble where you *do* care about things but only those that affect you as a *White person*. She didn't want that. She wanted to break out of that mindset. Val could help her do that.

"Thanks so much, Val...I'd be happy to learn from you...since *you are the expert*, after all," Riley said, sheepishly, and almost jokingly. She had heard about the DHS some time ago terminating the temporary, and protected, status, of thousands of Venezuelans, placing them in a terrible limbo, and putting them all at risk for deportation. The latter had the possibility of further destabilizing Venezuela, and region as a whole, benefiting those which wanted to turn into a capitalist paradise. With everything that was happening, it was far too easy to be pulled into the deluge of news. You could easily, and quickly, be overwhelmed.

Those who followed the news may have recalled the U.S. seizure of a Venezuelan presidential plane, sitting in the Dominican Republic, and the U.S. designation of Venezuela as a new part of an "axis of evil" with Cuba and Nicaragua. They might have caught the meeting between U.S. and Venezuelan envoys about migration, releasing U.S. nationals, and other topics, with hopes of improved relations, despite bombing of the country in January and destruction of boats with Venezuelan residents in a brazen assertion of imperialist power. It had the message that if you mess with the U.S., then this would happen to *you*.

Corporate media outlets in the U.S. would undoubtedly obscure the country's plan to hold legislative and regional elections on April 27th of the year before, or the presentation, by Maduro, at one time, of a package of constitutional reforms, said to expand participatory democracy and establish "a long-term economic roadmap" for Venezuela. Whether one agreed with those actions, or not, the fact was that U.S. media was overtly hostile toward Venezuela, making it hard to know what was *really* going on. What would happen for Venezuela going toward, in the future, was extremely uncertain because Delcy Rodríguez's concessions-of-sorts were delighting the U.S. all too much. At the same time, they were levying legal threats against her, including a reported criminal indictment on purported "corruption and money laundering charges," which the U.S. denied and claimed was "fake news," along with other forms of blackmail.

There probably wouldn't be articles noting how Venezuela lost CITGO, part of the country's state oil company. Some said that actions like these had occurred due to U.S. aggression coupled with incompetence and collusion by the country's right-wing opposition, of which Machado was part of, causing the country to lose *tens of billions* of dollars. Venezuelan migrants were *originally* sent, by the U.S., to the notorious Guantanamo

prison, then those same migrants arrived in Venezuela where they were received in a dignified manner.

Despite Riley's claims, Val was *no expert*. Sure, she followed the news closely, and read alternative publications, but she hadn't made it her life's work of course. She only wanted to know what was going on in her birth country. Who wouldn't? She didn't plan to go back any time soon but she liked to be connected to her roots.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a nearby flower. Oh no, her mom didn't do *that* did she? Uh oh. She tried to stop Riley's gaze and attempted to draw her attention away. "Let's go upstairs and talk a little more...it will be more *comfortable* there," she said, while putting her plate in the sink. She didn't even attempt to wash it off, not this time. All this was for naught.

She saw it. The majestic colors of the blooming hurtsickles outside caught her eye. "Let's go outside and check out those goggleblusters...they look beautiful!" Val put her head in her hands. She couldn't be more humiliated. How could her mom do this do her? *Why* did her mom do this to her? Did she *know* that she liked Riley or something? That couldn't be good. She still hadn't come out to her as a lesbian, yet. She wasn't sure how and was afraid she would reject her.

Riley pulled Val outside, opening the door with a fast motion, as Val had done earlier, and made her way to the front garden. There the flowers were. They were blooming right in front of her. "Were you trying to hide this from me, Val? Who wouldn't want to see flowers like that? I mean their petals look *amazing*, and I'd love to have them on ice cream."

Val sighed. She had to tell her, even though she would sort of be admitting she liked Riley... "They look like your eyes, Riley...Uh… so… I was joking with my mom and I guess she must have taken me seriously and planted them...isn't it *weird* to plant blue bonnets which have the same color as your eyes?...I mean…" Her voice trailed off.

Riley shook her head. She didn't find it weird at all. She tried to tamp down Val's fears about these flowers and what they meant. "Don't worry... the flowers only show how you *care* so much about me...I'd do the same for you...but I don't know of any brown-colored flowers...except decaying ones...and that's *too* depressing!"

Val let out a hearty laugh. They started chattering about how each of them called the flowers by a different name, whether a blue bonnet or a googlebuster. They nerdily listed all the other names, with Riley pulling a small notepad out of her pocket to scribble them down: a bluecap, cornbottle, boutonierre flower, bachelor's buton, or hurtsickle. "But my favorite name of the flower, Riley," Val began, is "cornflower, because it reminds me of *you*."

As they sat together and enjoyed each other's company, Riley took the initiative. It seemed like the right time. She asked a big question. "Uh...Val, can I kiss you?"

Val was surprised. Was Riley really asking this? Did she really want this? Val nodded. Her dreams were *finally* coming true.

She brought her face closer to Val's. Before they knew it, their lips were touching. They kissed in front of the cornflowers and their hair touched one another. Riley loved the feeling of Val's warm lips touching her own. They couldn't be happier together. Apparently, now they were *girlfriends*, although that hadn't been the original plan...

Just then, Val's mom approached in her suave electric car, a pinkish-red Audi e-tron GT. As Val heard the car, she nearly jumped out of Riley's loving embrace, leaving her confused. She approached her mom, who was parking her car. Riley was still in a bit of a daze. She couldn't believe she had kissed Val. Were they romantic partners now? Maybe? She was still trying to to figure it out. As Val's mom stepped out of her car, Val attempted to explain herself.

"Mom, you're back early...Riley came over to hang out...and well...we just did things that friends do, *you know*...that's how it is..."

Val said this uneasily. She didn't want to lie to her mom, but she felt she had no choice. What if her mom got angry? What if she threw her out? What would she do then? She didn't like this.

Her mom chuckled. "Oh, my sweet Valentina...I *know* you are gay...you don't need..."

This horrified Val. How did her mom figure it out? She had tried her best to hide it from her. She didn't want her to know. What was she going to do to her? She stuttered as she attempted to reply. This wasn't how it was supposed to go! She wanted to come out on her own terms. That's how it should be, right? She decided to be honest.

"I...wanted to tell you mom...but I was so afraid of what you might do...or say...I..."

Her mom walked forward and hugged her. She began to cry a little, with tears streaming down her face. Her own daughter was afraid of *her*? That made her more sad than anything else she had heard that day at the event with other Venezuelan émigrés. The fact that Val couldn't tell her this, did *not* make her feel good. Why did she think this? She had to clear the air once and for all. She had to avoid this crisis.

"Sweetie...you are my pride and joy, my *mija*. I'll love you no matter what. It's your business who you love...I don't dictate that for you...just know that I will always have your back."

Val began crying. She couldn't be happier to hear this. It always great to have a supportive parent. At least part of this coming out was unfolding as she imagined. Riley wasn't sure what to do. She didn't want to walk away, but she also didn't want to ruin their moment either… that wouldn't be right.

As she remained indecisive, Val's strong arm grabbed hers. She suddenly found herself carried like a princess through the air. *Why* was this happening? And so fast! It was a *lot* for her to process. "Val!," she said, with a sense of desperation as her face turned red once more, "you don't have to do this. I can walk *on my own*."

She shook her head. That's not how this would go down. She wanted to be proud of who she was, even as Riley's face became redder than a full glass of red wine.

"Mom, I'd like you to meet my *girlfriend*, Riley Andersen." Her mom nodded. She had seen Riley around and remembered her daughter blabbing about her after she returned from hockey camp. That was the moment she *knew* that her precious mija was gay. She was more supportive because some other mothers she had talked to were going through the same thing at that time. After that, she had read many articles about it.

Val finally released Riley and placed her feet onto the ground. They all hugged one another and headed inside. Her mom then jokingly declared, "Val planted them for *you*, Riley, she told me so." Val gave a disapproving look. She wasn't supposed to say *that*! Her mom kept throwing her off with stuff like this. UGH! "MOM! *That was a secret!*"

Riley began laughing. They all went inside the house and closed the door. They all planned to have a fun time. Her dad wasn't there. He was away for business, like always, managing a company which helped Venezuelan-Americans settle in the U.S., which even more difficult now, with the brutal U.S. immigration crackdown and mass deportation. What remained, for all of them, was something they would figure out together...

End Notes

I went back and forth on this title, and even had, as an early title, "Blossoming Blue Bonnets: Valentina's Truth-Bombs About Venezuela and Riley's Boldness," among other variations.

For this story, I relied upon sources noted on the "Venezuelan Americans" and "Venezuelan cuisine" Wikipedia pages plus information from the official page on the film on Pixar's website, an interview with Lilimar, a CBR character guide on Inside Out 2 characters, Inside Out 2 production notes, and other assorted pages like the Disney, Heroes and Villains, and Inside Out wiki fandom pages for Val. In fact, I only found one fic which noted her as Dominican and referenced it in the text: Rosette C's well-done, and put together, fic, entitled "Oak Lane." There are very few fics on there on AO3 about the somewhat current events in Venezuela. When the original version of this fic was published, there was only one entitled "Libertadores (Liberators)" by FoxyAtlas, beginning relatively negatively by calling Nicolas Maduro a swindler (basically) and implying the same for Hugo Chavez by saying the former was corrupt. That view, which doesn't have much nuance, clearly aligns with a Western/U.S. perspective, and seems to say the protesters are completely justified, without noting the role of Western countries. That fic also describes Maduro as a "dictator." This fic goes a different route.

I also drew from pages 233-243, 247-255 of Russell Maddicks' book, "The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture: Venezuela," which I read on Hoopla, to get a better understanding of what Venezuelans eat. I linked to actual recipes if you ever want to make this food featured inn this story. I learned that the Val/Riley ship is called Valey (or Rival, Valley, Ortizen, and Ortisen) from the page on it on the shipping fandom site, which said that "before the movie came out, some fans believed that Val and Riley would become a canon couple or that Riley would have a confirmed crush on her due to some of the clips shown in the trailers. While this didn't become a reality, it didn't stop fans from still liking the idea. Many fans think of Valey as an unrequited crush on Riley's part, possibly with Val being her gay awakening...Given the age gap between the two characters, some prefer this interpretation rather than a future romantic relationship." Furthermore, the fic "con tanto amor" was used as an inspiration for the food section of this story.

Notably, in one article, co-writer of "Inside Out 2", Dave Holstein, stated, in terms of Val and Riley in the film, "I think that the discussion throughout the entire film is just to give her someone to look up to, the way a freshman looks up to a senior. I mean, [it's a] girl crush in that way, but it's like there's someone who… I always had this in school too, where you see someone who seems way older. They're probably 18 months

older, but they just found a confidence in themselves that speaks to where people want to be at that age in life. Frankly, it's not even age, it's confidence, and we wanted to give her that character to then give her anxiety, to then give us a movie."

This was originally posted on Sunset, a femslash fanfic site, recently. However, it was removed when I was perma-banned for mishandling relations with a few users, despite apologizing to those users, removing certain passages of fics, and apologizing to the Sunset admin (and others). As such, I would recommend **against** *anyone* joining that site, or Superlove. Both admins (Melo/Kat for Superlove, Agnes for Sunset) are friends with each other. Those admins are very particular and not in a good way. I find the whole circumstance deeply unfortunate. I wish it could have been resolved a much better way.

Also, I saved a copy on the Internet Archive. I do not want this fic to be lost. I have not included some tags on there (like Exclusive to Sunset, First-ever Inside Out fic here, Sunset's Femslash Refresh 2026, Age Gaps (used Age Difference), Queer Community (used Queer Themes), first Valey fic on here, First Kisses (used First Kiss), Lesbians In Love, Developing Feelings, and Prompt Fill), but others have been retained. On Sunset it was listed as part of one series: My Femslash Refresh 2026 Collection.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!